

**Release to Captives**     Third Sunday in Ordinary Time/C     January 24, 2016     5:00 PM  
Vigil Mass     Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10;     **1 Cor 12:12-30;**     **Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21**     (This is about bringing newness to life on earth. It's about a new kind of social order, one marked by the influence of God on the values and the principles of the people who live in it.)

**“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

A tremendous moment in the life of Jesus, and really in the life of the people of God, who have been gathered for centuries through all kinds of ups and downs, mostly downs, and now are being formed into the body of Christ through Jesus, who now identifies himself as the fulfillment of this great prophecy. **What Jesus is saying is that he finds his very mission already expressed in Isaiah the prophet;** and if you want, you can think of a prophecy as the original “text message” sent from God to people who weren't listening. Well, you don't listen! We'll write it down for you! And here they had the scroll of Isaiah, and **Jesus sees in it a description of himself, of his mission, of his life, of the reason he has come.**

You can see from Isaiah and from Jesus' own life that neither the prophet nor Jesus himself restricted their ideas of what they are supposed to do on earth to what is usually called the strictly religious sphere, or what some people call the “otherworldly concerns.” **This is about bringing newness to life on earth. It's about a new kind of social order, one marked by the influence of God on the values and the principles of the people who live in it.** So indeed these are glad tidings. **This is good news, especially for the vast majority of people who don't enjoy prosperity,** especially at that time when the few who prospered were completely detached from the vast majority of people.

**So the good news is of change coming. The blind are to see,** and the blind does not only mean those who don't have physical sight; it means that, but it means more than that. **The deaf are to hear,** and it doesn't simply mean those who don't have physical hearing; it doesn't mean that, but more than that. **The poor are to experience relief. The imprisoned are to be freed.** This last one is our special focus today.

Now we know that **our society,** which champions and promotes freedom, is actually, being **overwhelmed with crime and criminal activity,** perhaps because of all this freedom. Our own city of Chicago is sadly overrun with street crime and senseless murders, often accidental, murders by careless criminals, often young people with weapons. It would be very natural for us to experience fear and anger. However, **it is counterproductive to let fear and anger determine public policy.** Hopefully anger can motivate us to do something, but it is not a good basis for public policy. **Crime needs to be punished, but criminals need rehabilitation. We believe in the ability of the individual to change, to respond to divine grace, to repent.**

The word “penitentiary” actually comes from a Latin word meaning “grief” and “sorrow.” There is time for grief and sorrow over wrongs that are done. And most importantly **the perpetrator has to grieve and sorrow.** That is really the primary purpose of the sacrament of penance; it is to give us the grace to grieve and to be sorry for our sins. Guilty parties must confront the evil they have committed and experience sorrow, motivated by the love of God. This is true sorrow. **They need a way of making restitution and turning their lives around**

**and becoming good citizens. And this is fundamental to Christian faith that we believe this is possible.** It is in our own best interest to support these endeavors. There are some people who are depraved and incorrigible, but many are not. It is important that we do not treat all the same, especially **it's important that we do not treat young offenders as we would hardened criminals.** To put young offenders together with hardened criminals and psychopaths is certainly contrary to the best interests of society, as well as contrary to the best interests of the young offenders.

In the second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians we see a reflection of **our interrelatedness. Do we ever think about being connected to people who have seriously offended us, our society, our families.** We are connected to them. **We are all one in the body of Christ** if they are baptized, and many of them are; and if they are not baptized yet, they are called to Baptism by God's providential will. **In St. Paul we see a mystical vision of the Church seen as a single organism,** where each member belongs to and serves the others. Both the message from Luke, Jesus' mission found in Isaiah, and St. Paul's vision of the body spur us on to action. **The gospel wants us to act in the service of the afflicted and the poor.** And **St. Paul's thought invites us to consider the wholeness of the Church and how we can serve the whole.**

As we look forward to the Lenten season coming in a few weeks, **our bishop will once again ask us to help support the many ministries of our diocese.** These are ways in which we can live out our connectedness that we have in the body of Christ, which is our Church. **But we also are called to care for and to serve the larger society: to bring good news to the poor, to release captives.** There is right now before Congress a bipartisan bill called the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act*. It has, believe it or not, bipartisan support, one of the few bills in recent years that does. I will read a quote: "The federal support provided by this bill is essential that state juvenile justice **programs provide young people with the supports they need for successful rehabilitation and reentry into their communities.**" So you will be invited, when you leave Mass, to join this bipartisan support by signing a postcard sent to Senator Kirk, who is yet uncommitted. Postcards are available in the library.